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State Dept. Is Asking Colleges To Curb Research by Chinese

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WASHINGTON, Nov. 26 — The State Department has begun asking academic officials to cooperate in imposing security-related restrictions on research done by Chinese scholars studying in the United States.

Many scholars from China are working in science and technological research, areas that the State Department says are subject to export control legislation. Altogether about 2,000 Chinese students enter the United States for study each year. The department oversees academic programs for them because of its role in granting entry visas.

The response to the State Department from at least two universities has been swift and negative.

C. Peter Magrath, President of the University of Minnesota, told the State Department in a letter last month, "Our mission is teaching, research and public service, and neither our faculty nor our administrators were hired to implement government security actions." Minnesota has 130 Chinese students, one of the largest groups in the country.

At the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Prof. Herman Feshbach, the head of the Physics Department, said he received a "page full of questions" from the State Department last spring about the work and professional associations of a scientist from Peking.

Professor Feshbach said that the accompanying letter had appealed for his cooperation "in view of how we feel about Communists." Mr. Feshbach did not complete the form and has had no further contact with the State Department on the matter.

Keith Powell II, the exchange officer

for China in the State Department's office of Chinese affairs, said that the need to monitor the activities of students stems from a change in policy over the last two or three years as cultural agreements have been concluded with Peking. The United States and China resumed diplomatic relations in January 1979.

Until exchanges were begun as part of the Chinese-American reconciliation, the Chinese were subject to the same scrutiny as students from Soviet-bloc nations, Mr. Powell said. Under such a process, a visa for a student can take six months to process, and very few are granted to scholars from Communist nations for research in sensitive areas.

Although the Chinese still fall under those rules, Mr. Powell said, efforts are being made to have the regulations changed. In the meantime, a compromise has been worked out that allows Chinese students to get visas before their programs of study are "fully analyzed" by the United States. The increased number of Chinese students in United States universities compares with a total of about 50 Soviet-bloc students, whose courses of study have been cleared in advance.

Three laws govern the export of American technology: the Export Administration Act, the Arms Control Act and the Atomic Energy Act. The State Department monitors compliance with export regulations on behalf of the Commerce and Defense Departments. Of particular concern to the United States is the loss of technological knowledge with military potential.

According to Kenneth H. Keller, the University of Minnesota's Vice President for Academic Affairs, and Kurt Gottfried, a Cornell physicist who is chairman of the American Physical Society's Committee on International Freedom of Scientists, the Commerce Department has been most active recently — under the Carter as well as the Reagan Administrations — in attempt-

ing to extend the definition of what technological knowledge is subject to licensing controls.

The State Department's position is that it has not asked universities to police the activities of Chinese students. The department says that it has only outlined the law and advised universities that they may be approached by Government officials concerned with export control.

State Dept. Suggest Restrictions

But in a Sept. 30 letter to Professor W. R. Franta of the Computer Sciences Department at Minnesota, Mr. Powell wrote in detail about the program of a Chinese scholar, Qi Yulu.

"It is suggested that Qi be restricted from any access to unpublished or classified Government-funded work," he wrote. "It is also suggested that the program emphasize course work with minimal involvement in applied research. There should be no access to the design, construction or maintenance data relevant to individual items of computer hardware. There should be no access to source codes or their development."

Mr. Powell added, "I would take this opportunity to remind you that this office should be advised prior to any visits to any industrial or research facilities."

Mr. Magrath replied that the university did no classified work in line with its policy against secret research. "Both in principle and in practice, the restrictions proposed in your letter are inappropriate for an American research university," he said.